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QUESTION OF PALESTINE
THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST
REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE ISRAELI PRACTICES AFFECTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE AND OTHER ARABS OF THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES
MEASURES TO ELIMINATE INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

SECURITY COUNCIL
Fifty-third year

Letter dated 27 March 1998 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Enclosed please find the text of a revealing article, entitled "Israel's Darkest Secrets", that appeared in the Op-Ed section of The New York Times on 25 March 1998, written by Yossi Melman, an Israeli journalist, regarding the past and ongoing engagement of successive Israeli Governments in political assassinations (see annex).*

Of course, we disagree with some of the opinions expressed by the writer; however, we believe that the subject matter is of extreme importance for the international community, especially in view of the fact that United Nations organs, including the Security Council, have actually dealt with political assassinations that have been committed by Israel, such as the 1988 assassination of Mr. Khalil Al-Wazir (Abu-Jihad). This also brings to mind the assassination of United Nations mediator Count Folke Bernadotte by terrorist Zionist groups even before the establishment of the State of Israel.

* The annex is being circulated in the language of submission only.

I would be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter, as well as that of the enclosed article, distributed as an official document of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, under agenda items 36, 37, 87 and 152, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Nasser AL-KIDWA
Permanent Observer of Palestine
to the United Nations

ANNEX

Israel's Darkest Secrets (*The New York Times* Op-Ed, Wednesday, 25 March 1998, page A23. Written by Yossi Melman, who covers intelligence issues for the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*):

Tel Aviv – In televised remarks last week, Ariel Sharon, a senior minister in the Israeli Government, warned that Israel would eventually assassinate Khaled Meshal, the leader of the Muslim fundamentalist group Hamas. Mr. Meshal has already survived one assassination attempt, six months ago when Israeli agents sprayed him with poison in Amman, Jordan.

The announcement by Mr. Sharon, who is the Infrastructures Minister in the Government of Benjamin Netanyahu, was the most explicit confirmation ever uttered by a top Cabinet official of Israel's policy on political assassination. In the last four decades Israel has been blamed for the deaths of several dozen Palestinian terrorists, Nazi war criminals and foreign scientists who were employed by Arab countries to manufacture weapons of mass destruction. But the Israeli Government has never publicly claimed responsibility for these acts.

Though it was not his intention, Mr. Sharon has contributed to a much-needed opening of debate about Israel's unspoken policy of using assassination as a political and security tool. Now is the time for the Israeli Government to admit its past actions and to reconsider whether assassinations have succeeded in accomplishing its goals at all.

Four weeks ago, an Israeli parliamentary subcommittee on intelligence and security services issued a carefully worded report on the botched attack on Mr. Meshal. "The committee found that for many years, Israel's Government did not formulate a policy for fighting terrorism, a policy which should have been based on profound consideration and on logical, consistent and continuous line of thought," the report said. "In the absence of such a policy the element of responding to terrorist attacks has come to carry disproportionate weight."

This ambiguous phrasing might be read as criticism of the Government's use of assassinations. But the report does not express opposition to assassination on moral or ethical grounds. It only implies that Israel needs to re-examine its use as a means of achieving the nation's political and security goals.

Isser Harel, who was head of the Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency, from 1952 to 1963, recently told me in an interview that on several occasions Cabinet ministers and

other intelligence officers encouraged him to have Israeli traitors and spies killed. Mr. Harel claimed that he adamantly refused to do so and that he believed the fate of suspected spies and traitors should be determined by a court of law, not a band of assassins.

But he did not feel the need to give non-Israelis the same privilege. In the early 1960s, Mossad agents assassinated or tried to kill German scientists who helped Egypt develop rockets and chemical and biological weapons for use against Israel. In 1965, a Mossad hit team killed Herbert Tzokors, a Latvian who collaborated with the Nazis during World War II.

The most extensive and systematic use of assassinations followed the murder of 11 Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics in September 1972. Prime Minister Golda Meir ordered the Mossad chief, Gen. Zvi Zamir, to take revenge and hit any Palestinian directly or indirectly connected to the murders. This campaign resulted in the murder of 11 members of the Black September terrorist group.

During the 70's and early 80's, the Mossad planned the killing of most of what Israel considered the "master terrorists" of the Palestinian movement. The wanted list included Yasir Arafat, Abu Nidal, George Habash and Ahmed Jibril. The Mossad and the Israeli Army failed to assassinate those leaders, but succeeded in killing many others on the list: Zoher Mohsin, leader of the pro-Syrian group A-Saika, was killed in 1979 in France. Abu Jihad, who was Yasir Arafat's deputy in the Palestine Liberation Organization, was killed in 1988 in Tunis. Abbas Moussawi, the Secretary General of Hezbollah, was killed in 1992 in Lebanon. And most recently, Fathi Shiqaqi, the leader of the Islamic Holy War, was killed in 1995 in Malta.

With the single exception of the liquidation campaign against the terrorists who killed the Olympic athletes, the purpose of the Israeli policy of assassination has not been vengeance. Mossad operatives claimed in the recent parliamentary subcommittee hearings that revenge is an unworthy motive in battling terror. They explained that the only reason they used assassination was to frighten and deter terrorists and to disrupt their plans for future violence.

But if that was the declared goal, it seems that the policy has not succeeded. Those who were assassinated were soon replaced and terrorism resumed, sometimes more ferociously than before.

Now, with the lessons of the bungled operation in Jordan and the criticism arising from the recent hearings still fresh in memory, the Israeli Government needs to rethink its policy on assassinations. Except for Mr. Sharon and Prime Minister Netanyahu himself, most Cabinet ministers and many senior Mossad officials publicly and privately

acknowledge the ineffectiveness of assassination as a weapon in the war against terrorism. More effective, they believe, are economic sanctions against states that support terrorists and better international cooperation in pursuing terrorists.

The Israeli Government may not be ready today to pass a resolution that would put an end to the assassination of its enemies. But at least Israel's leaders are now opening up discussion about one of the nation's oldest taboos.